DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 431 515 PS 027 588

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TITLE Parenting Support on Kibbutz and in Urban Israeli Settings.
PUB DATE 1999-04-00
NOTE 8p.; Poster presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Albuquerque, NM, April 15-18, 1999).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; *Competence; Coping; Day Care; Employed Parents; Foreign Countries; *Mother Attitudes; *Mothers; Parent Responsibility; Parent Role; *Parents; Preschool Children; Preschool Education; *Social Support Groups; Urban Areas
IDENTIFIERS Israel; Kibbutzim; Role Satisfaction

ABSTRACT

Although the Israeli kibbutz system of communally organized childcare has been the focus of considerable research with respect to developmental outcomes, relatively few studies have examined the kibbutz from a parenting perspective. This study compared perceived supports for parenting reported by 19 kibbutz mothers with those reported by 18 urban Israeli mothers. At the time of their oldest child's fourth birthday, mothers completed questionnaires on family demographics, childcare arrangements, social network, social support and satisfaction, and ability to cope with parenting, childcare, and family responsibilities. The findings indicated that there were contextual differences between the two environments. Kibbutz mothers worked and children were in care for longer hours than in urban settings. Even with these longer hours, kibbutz mothers felt more satisfied overall with the support they received. Kibbutz and city mothers were similar in satisfaction with their role as parents, available social support networks, and feelings of competence in coping. The findings suggest that there are continuing distinctions between kibbutz and urban Israeli settings with respect to the supports provided for working mothers. (Author/JPB)

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PARENTING SUPPORT ON KIBBUTZ AND IN URBAN ISRAELI SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT

The kibbutz system of communally organized childcare has been the focus of considerable research with respect to developmental outcomes. Relatively few studies have examined the kibbutz from a parenting perspective. In this study perceived supports for parenting reported by 19 kibbutz mothers were compared with responses of 18 urban Israeli mothers. At the time of their oldest child's fourth birthday, mothers completed questionnaires on family demographics, childcare arrangements, social network, social support and satisfaction, and ability to cope with parenting, childcare, and family responsibilities. Results indicated contextual differences between the two environments. Kibbutz mothers worked and children were in care for longer hours. Even with these longer hours, kibbutz mothers felt more satisfied overall with the support they received. Kibbutz and city mothers were similar in satisfaction with their role as parents, available social support networks, and feelings of competence in coping. These findings suggest that there are continuing distinctions between kibbutz and urban Israeli settings with respect to the supports provided for working mothers.

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KIBBUTZ CHILDCARE

The kibbutz system of communally organized childcare for has been the focus of considerable research with respect to developmental outcomes. Descriptive accounts of the kibbutz ecology, as it has changed over the years, indicate that a distinctive feature of kibbutz childcare has been its system of multiple caregivers, based on a division of childrearing responsibility between parents and the kibbutz community. In the early years, children lived in the children's houses (specially outfitted buildings centrally located in the campus-like community) and came to the parents' home only for several hours in the late afternoon, and on weekends. Under these conditions, the metapelet (the kibbutz caregiver) assumed primary responsibility for the children in her care.

Over the last 20-30 years, the family has become increasingly more dominant with respect to childcare. Today, kibbutz children live with their parents and attend childcare at the children's houses only during daytime hours while their parents work. With the current use of the children's house only during daytime hours, some suggest that rather than functioning as a second "home" for children, the children's house now functions as a daycare center similar to urban childcare settings (Sagi & Koren-Karie, 1993). Alternatively, others (Dar, 1998) suggest that many unique features of kibbutz childcare remain important, particularly from the perspective of support afforded to kibbutz parents. For example, compared with city daycare, kibbutz children's houses remain a central communal institution, providing intensive, quality care 8-9 hours a day, beginning from infancy. Ongoing administration of the children's houses by kibbutz education committees reflects a high degree of collective commitment to providing early care and educational services for members of the community.

RESEARCH GOALS

There is considerable research on child outcomes of kibbutz childrearing. Relatively few studies examine the kibbutz from a parenting perspective. In this research perceived supports for parenting reported by contemporary kibbutz mothers, whose children live at home, are compared with responses of urban Israeli mothers of young children.

Kibbutz and city mothers are compared on:

- Satisfaction with their parenting role and the balance of work and childcare responsibilities.
- Feelings of support and ability to cope with specific parenting functions.
- The relationship between maternal satisfaction and perceived supports.

METHODS

Participants

- 19 kibbutz and 18 city mothers of 4 year olds.
- All mothers were native Israelis.
- Participants were part of a longitudinal study of parenting starting when the target child was 5 months old (Bornstein, Maital & Tal, 1997).

- Kibbutz and city mothers were similar in demographic background:

	Kibbutz	City
Mothers' Age (years)	31.75	32.68
Percent with College degrees	79%	89%
Marital status- % Married	95%	94%
Work status:		
Employed	85%	72%
Maternity leave	5%	5.6%
Student	10%	5.6%
At home	0%	16.7%
Child Age (months)	49.11	48.88
Gender	42% boys	55% boys
Attends Childcare	100%	100%

Procedures & Measures

Mothers responded to the following pencil and paper questionnaires provided during a visit near the time of their first child's fourth birthday.

- Family Description Questionnaire. This questionnaire included basic demographic information, items concerning childcare arrangements, and ratings (on a scale of 1-6) of maternal satisfaction with parenting, childcare arrangements, and the balance of work and childrearing responsibilities.
- Social Network Form (SNF). A Hebrew translation of the SNF was administered. The SNF (Weinraub, Jaeger, & Wolf, 1989) provides information about supports available from members of the mothers' social network, satisfaction with support in specific domains (Emotional, Parenting, Childcare, and Household help), and perceived ability to cope with various responsibilities (Overall, Emotional, Childcare, Household, and Financial).

RESULTS

Mothers' Work and Childcare Arrangements

		KIBBUTZ	CITY	*p*
Mom's work hours (for those currently employed)				
	M	41.00	31.77	.03
	SD	6.45	12.57	.02
Hours in childcare				
	M	51.21	33.72	.000
	SD	5.03	8.44	.02
Childcare group size				
	M	19.44	27.00	.003
	SD	3.29	8.5	.002

Satisfaction with Parenting & Work Responsibilities

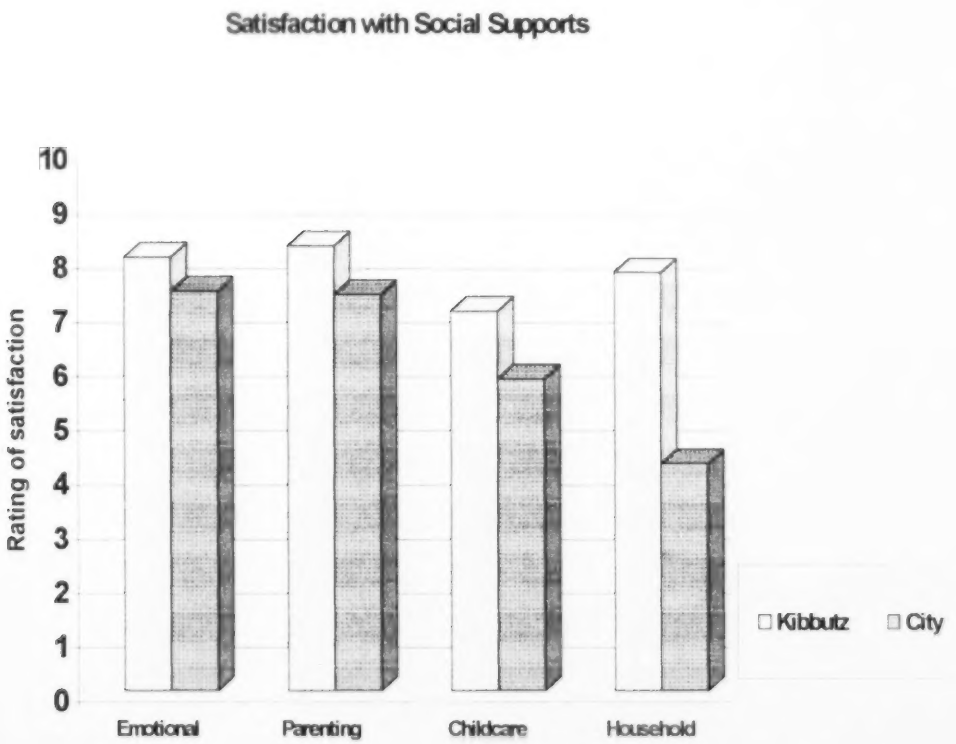
Satisfaction with:		KIBBUTZ	CITY	*P*
Parenting				
	M	5.11	5.17	
	SD	1.15	.86	
Balance of Parenthood & Work				
	M	4.00	3.72	
	SD	.82	1.64	.002
Childcare Arrangements				
	M	4.68	3.75	.01
	SD	.48	1.06	.000

- Both kibbutz and city mothers felt satisfied with parenting and the balance between parenting and work roles.
- Kibbutz mothers were more satisfied with childcare arrangements.
- There was significantly greater variance among city mothers in their perceptions of balance, and in satisfaction with childcare.

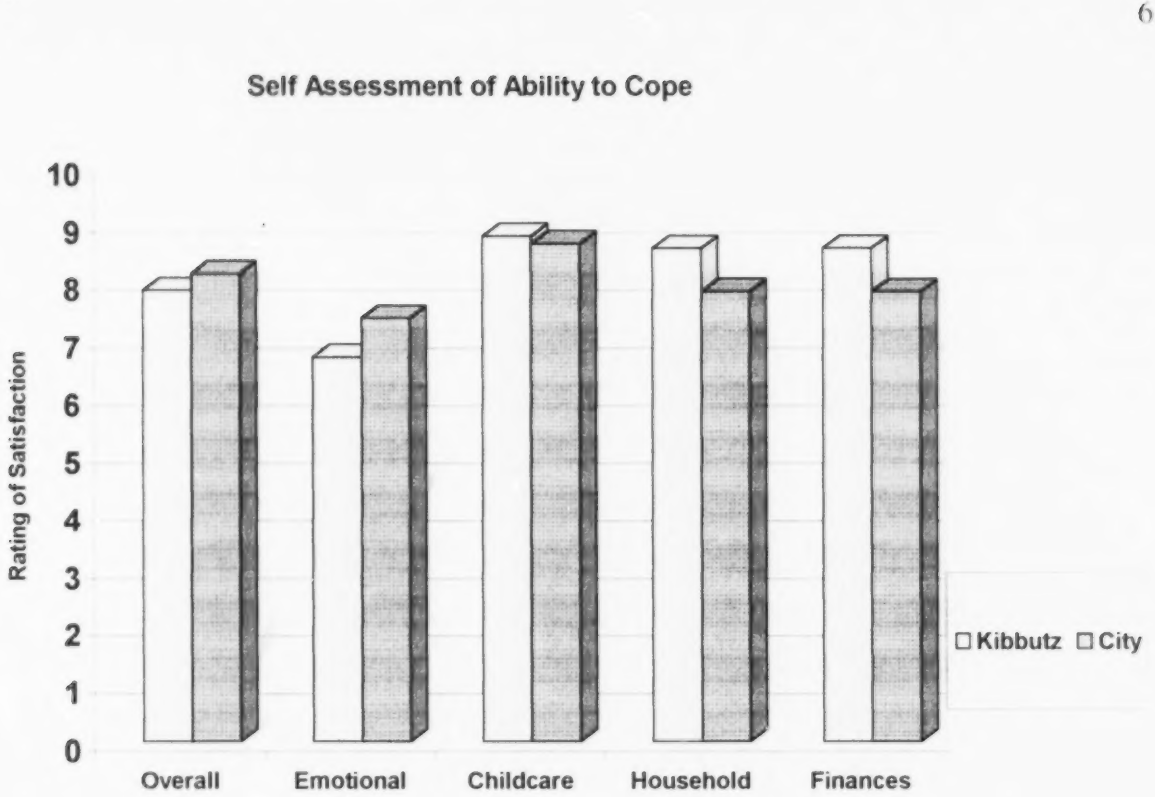
Social Networks

People to whom Mothers Turned for Support (First choices)		
	Kibbutz	**City**
Grandparents	35%	42%
Parents' friends	40%	37%
Parents' Siblings	15%	21%
Other	10%	0%

- Both the city and kibbutz mothers reported extensive social support networks that were similar in composition



- Overall, kibbutz mothers expressed more satisfaction with social network supports than city mothers, $F(1,28) = 11.59$, $p \leq .002$. The main difference between groups was a significantly higher level of satisfaction with support for household tasks among kibbutz mothers.
- There also was a significant within subjects effect for type of support, $F(3,84) = 10.16$, $p \leq .001$. Both groups of mothers expressed more satisfaction with Emotional support and support for Parenting, than with instrumental supports for Childcare and Household tasks.



- There were no significant differences between kibbutz and city mothers in any of their self evaluations of their Ability to Cope, $F(1,30)=.27$, *ns*.
- For both groups there were significant within subject differences across domains in perceived Ability to Cope, $F(4, 30) = 4.74$, $p \leq .004$, (adjusted df by Greenhouse-Geisser). The mothers felt more capable of coping with child care and financial responsibilities and less in control of their own emotional well-being.

Relations among Parenting Satisfaction, Childcare Arrangements & Perceived Support

- Satisfaction with parenting related only to Overall Coping and Coping with Childcare responsibilities, rs = .34 and .36, ps $\leq .05$, respectively.
- Balance between Parenting and Work was not related to Childcare arrangements, Satisfaction with Social Supports, or ability to Cope.
- Satisfaction with Childcare arrangements related to Satisfaction with Emotional Support, r = .39, $p \leq .05$.
- Satisfaction with Childcare also related to perceived coping across the different domains. For coping with own Emotional well-being, Childcare and Financial responsibilities, rs = .36, .37, .41, ps $\leq .05$, respectively, and for coping with household responsibilities, $r = .66$, $p \leq .01$.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Our data support the view that there continue to be important contextual differences between the kibbutz and city as supportive contexts for working parents of young children. Kibbutz mothers worked longer hours and their children spent more time in childcare. Typically, kibbutz class size was smaller. Although they worked longer hours, kibbutz mothers reported greater overall satisfaction with the support they received. This difference was most pronounced with respect to support for household tasks.

There also were notable similarities among the kibbutz and city mothers. Both groups of mothers expressed a high degree of satisfaction in their role as parents. In both contexts mothers also reported similar support networks. Both groups of mothers perceived themselves as capable of coping with parenting responsibilities. They expressed greater confidence in their ability to cope with instrumental tasks of childcare and financial responsibilities, and less in control of their own emotional well-being. For all the mothers satisfaction with Parenting and with Childcare arrangements related to feelings of increased Ability to Cope with responsibilities of parenting.

Over the last 20-30 years there have been signficant changes in the organization of childrearing on the kibbutz – particularly with respect to the balance of responsibility between parents and community sponsored childcare. Over time kibbutz mothers have sought and attained greater involvement in childcare. Today, kibbutz family life has become increasingly similar to urban Israeli family life, a fact that may lead to increased stress on kibbutz mothers trying to balance work and childcare. This study suggests that there are significant differences between kibbutz and city mothers in their satisfaction with childrearing supports, as well as broad similarities among the Israeli mothers in expressed satisfaction with parenting, the balance of parenthood and work, and their ability to cope. Further research is needed in order to examine the degree to which kibbutz-city differences result from the continuing, high quality of care available on kibbutz, or from more complex systemic relations inherent in communal responsibility for care.